



MI Fact Sheet Series

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING MENTAL ILLNESS

An account of hallucinations and delusions

Excerpt taken from E. Fuller Torrey, *Surviving Schizophrenia*, Harper and Row, New York, 1988

Everything looked vibrant, especially red; people took on a devilish look with black outlines and white shining eyes, all sorts of objects – chairs, buildings, obstacles – took on a life of their own; they seemed to make threatening gestures, to have an animistic (sic) outlook.

One day, while I was in the principal's office, suddenly the room became enormous, illuminated by a dreadful electric light that cast false shadows. Everything was exact, smooth, artificial, extremely tense; the chairs and tables seemed models placed here and there. Pupils and teachers were puppets revolving without cause, without objective. I recognised nothing, nobody. It was as though reality, attenuated, had slipped away from all these things and these people. Profound dread overwhelmed me, and as though lost, I looked around desperately for help. I heard people talking, but I did not grasp the meaning of the words. The voices were metallic, without warmth or colour.

From time to time, a word detached itself from the rest. It repeated itself over and over in my head, absurd, as though cut off-by a knife.

Everything seems to grip my attention, although I am not particularly interested in anything. I am speaking to you just now, but I can hear noises going on next door and in the corridor.

I find it difficult to shut these out, and it makes it more difficult for me to concentrate on what I am saying to you. Often the silliest little things that are going on seem to interest me. That's not even true; they don't interest me, but I find myself pre-occupied with them and wasting a lot of time this way.

An outsider may see only someone 'out of touch with reality'. In fact, we are experiencing so many realities that it is often confusing and sometimes totally overwhelming.

Sometimes when people speak to me, my head is overloaded. It's too much to hold at once. It goes out as quick as it goes in. It makes you forget what you just heard because you can't get hearing it long enough. It's just words in the air unless you can figure it out from their faces.

My trouble is that I've got too many thoughts. You might think about something, let's say that ashtray, and just think, oh yes, that's for putting my cigarette in, but I would think of it and then I would think of a dozen different things connected with it at the same time.

Useful references

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia
www.mifellowshipaustralia.org.au

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria
www.mifellowship.org

Mental Health Services Website (Vic)
www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth

National Alliance of the Mentally Ill (NAMI) (USA)
www.nami.org

Mental Health Council of Australia
www.mhca.com.au

SANE Australia
www.sane.org

Beyond Blue
www.beyondblue.org.au

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia fact sheets

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Understanding schizophrenia

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Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia
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